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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to determine why parents in Kentucky who homeschool their children chose homeschooling and what they considered the advantages to be. Responses received from 69 homeschooling parents showed that they chose homeschooling because of religion, social factors, and a desire for high achievement. They see both advantages and disadvantages to public schooling and homeschooling. Educational reform efforts appear to have had an impact on parents' decisions, with many objecting to aspects of Kentucky's educational reforms. Although computers are being used to augment the curriculum, the participants in this study did not consider them essential. The study also sought to determine if public schools can do anything to attract families that have made the decision to homeschool. This question generated the greatest response consensus, with parents responding that to reconsider public schooling, the public schools would need to be infused with religious practices and teachings. An appendix contains the survey. (Contains 1 table and 26 references.) (SLD)

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Homeschooling: Who and Why?

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, November, 1998

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Abstract

Even though homeschooling is not a new concept, it was a relatively small movement until 30 years ago. At this point in time, there are over a million students being homeschooled in the United States and the numbers seem to be growing quickly. Homeschooling has become a viable alternative to traditional education. It is no longer a peripheral movement, it now represents mainstream society. This study reports the results of a survey of parents who homeschool their children in Kentucky.

Even though homeschooling is receiving increased attention in the popular press, there is a paucity of research on the subject (Knowles, 1988). Parents in this study choose homeschooling due to religion, social factors, and a desire for high achievement. They see both advantages and disadvantages to public schooling and to homeschooling. Educational reform efforts appear to have had an impact on parents' decisions to homeschool their children. Although, computers are being used to augment the curriculum, the participants of this study did not consider them essential. This study sought to determine if there is anything the public schools can do to re-attract families who have made the decision to homeschool. This question generated the greatest consensus of response. The most frequent response emphasized the desire to infuse religion into the practices and curriculum of the public schools.

Homeschooling: Who and Why?

While homeschooling is becoming very popular as part of the parental school choice movement, it is not a new concept (Knowles, 1991). George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, and Albert Einstein are just a few alumni of homeschooling (Clark, 1994; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). By necessity, many of our forebears were educated at home due to geographic isolation or lack of schools, although some chose homeschooling due to the flexibility of study or the lack of fit with the available schools. Common Schools became readily available by the early to mid-19th century and political leaders hoped that Americanization through public education would limit excessive individualism that they felt threatened the cohesiveness of the nation and convince the public of the need for regard for the larger welfare (Clark, 1994; Kirschner, 1991; Knowles, 1988; Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992). They also felt the nation lacked a "common civic morality" that could be best addressed by attendance at a state-supported school "grounded in a common Christian morality" and that regardless of denomination, the school was to be based on the Bible and be the moral educator of the nation (Kirschner, 1991, p.143). Parents' hopes and expectations at this time were for their children to be able to "read the Bible, do some writing, and reckon well enough to get by on the farm" (Kirschner, 1991, p.142). Ironically, another reason for compulsory attendance was to prevent parents from keeping their children home to work (Clark, 1994).

By the late 19th century, parents began to see schooling as an opportunity for upward mobility. Schools became more professionalized with more emphasis on pedagogy and student management. Around the turn of the century, the first of many dialogues on the necessity of school reform began with criticisms of "lockstep teaching, rote memorization, passive students and an irrelevant curriculum" (Kirschner, 1991, p.151). Even though states adopted compulsory attendance laws before the turn of this century, some parents chose to educate their children at home. This was often viewed with concern by state and local educators who feared parents did not have the teaching skills to serve as educators. It now appears that the public schools themselves are coming under increasing scrutiny as uncredentialed parents appear to be educating their children quite successfully (Galen & Pitman, 1991).

Until 30 years ago, homeschooling was a small movement. Then, two very different individuals began making a significant impact. During the 1960's and 1970's John Holt and Raymond Moore inspired parents to consider educating their children at home (Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992; Lyman, 1998). Holt had been heavily involved in public school reform efforts but became convinced that public schools were unreformable. He began telling parents that public schools were by nature bureaucratic, inhumane settings that sought to rank and sort children using discriminatory standards and make them into docile obedient citizens (Franzosa, 1991; Kirschner, 1991). In 1977 he began a bimonthly newsletter Growing Without Schools espousing a liberal view that children could learn best through unstructured real life experiences in the

nurturing home environment and encouraged "unschooling". He urged that the "parents and the home, not the teachers and the school, are the child's best and wisest educators" (Franzosa, 1991, p.121). It is "the interest, ingenuity, and activity of the learner, not the teacher, that is primarily responsible for creating learning" (Holt, 1984). His newsletter became a support mostly for libertarian counter-culture types whose homeschooling efforts were driven by the natural curiosity of the child and the belief that an individual's welfare is the person's own responsibility, not a legitimate concern of the state (Franzosa, 1991; Lines, 1991; Lyman, 1998). Parents with this orientation have been labeled *pedagogues* by Van Galen (1991) and place a strong orientation on personal independence and autonomy. They dislike the "professionalization and bureaucratization" of modern education as it represents a microcosm of modern society (Van Galen, 1991, p.73).

Van Galen (1991) also outlines the factors influencing what she terms *idealogues*, representing Christian fundamentalists who object to the secular humanistic curriculum in the public schools. This very different strain of homeschooling began to be popular about the same time as Holt's movement, but came under the influence of Raymond Moore. Moore, an Ed.D. trained former United States Department of Education employee and Christian missionary, and his wife, a former teacher and reading specialist, began researching the developmental questions of whether educational institutions were a positive influence on young children and at what age formalized training should take place. Their work is written from a Christian perspective and is based

on developmental theories that young children are not ready for formalized educational approaches until sometime between the ages of 8 and 12. They criticized the negative impact of over-concern and dependence on peers that takes place in an institutionalized educational setting. Their writings became an important basis for the segment of homeschooling parents who make this choice due to conservative religious reasons (Lyman, 1998). Today, the parents who choose to educate their children at home in order to incorporate a religious basis to the educational curriculum are the largest and fastest growing group (Knowles, 1991; Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992; Lines, 1991; Mayberry, 1988; Phi Delta Kappa, 1998) and are changing the homeschooling crusade from "a crusade against 'the establishment' to a crusade against the secular forces of modern-day society (Lyman, 1998, p.7). In fact, for these parents, the academic outcomes are often secondary to the belief that homeschooling will produce children who adhere to the family's religious and ethical values (Clark, 1994; Lines, 1991).

Homeschooling appears to be continuing to change and is beginning to reflect our mainstream society. It is now difficult to characterize homeschoolers because they are an increasingly diverse group representative of a diverse society (Ray, 1988). There appears to be a growing number of well-educated, relatively affluent parents who are choosing homeschooling in order to improve the educational achievement of their children and in order to avoid what they view as problem-ridden public schools (Clark, 1994; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998; Knowles, 1991; Mayberry, 1988; Phi Delta Kappa, 1998). One factor, however, is

constant among parents who choose to homeschool their children: they feel they need to be deeply involved with their child's development and education and that children need to learn from people who care deeply about them (Clark, 1994; Lines, 1987; Ray, 1988).

Some of the concerns with the public school are socio-cultural (Clark, 1994; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998; Mayberry, 1988; Ray & Wartes, 1991). Parents who choose to homeschool fear the negative influence of peer groups on their children or fear that their children will not be safe in crime-ridden schools where drug use is rampant, teachers and students are robbed and assaulted, and guns and other weapons are prevalent. In fact, safety was the reason most parents in a recent Florida survey gave for deciding to homeschool their children (Kantrowitz & Wingert). There is also dissatisfaction due to the perception that schools are graduating students who are illiterate and unprepared for the workforce (Clark, 1994; Lyman, 1998; Mayberry, 1988). Some express a concern that educational reform is not providing children with the fundamental basic education they feel is essential, and some believe schools are not a nurturing place where their child's individual differences are nourished to help their child achieve to his or her fullest potential. An estimated 50 to 75% of parents who homeschool design their own curriculum to meet the needs of their children as opposed to purchasing one of the pre-packaged products on the market today (Lines, 1991). For some parents, the desire is to build stronger family bonds (Lyman, 1998). Some parents have also had some type of conflict with the public schools that have convinced them to attempt homeschooling (Knowles,

1991). However, one group that appears to be declining within the homeschooling movement is the liberal group who began homeschooling simply because they believe it is a superior place to learn (Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992).

Do homeschooled children actually do better than their peers in the public schools? On most academic measures, the homeschooled students outperform their public school counterparts (Clark, 1994; Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992; Ray & Wartes, 1991; Ray, 1988). Regardless of race, class, and parent educational level, homeschooled students perform at a higher achievement level when tested on standardized tests and compared to all students nationwide (Lyman, 1998; Ray & Wartes, 1991). In fact, the 1998 National Merit Scholarship Corporation reported more than 70 homeschooled students as semifinalists (National Merit Scholarship Corp, 1997). When the question is social development, homeschooled children have higher scores on self-concept measures, appear socially and emotionally well-adjusted, and have opportunities for interaction with other children and adults (Delahooke, 1986; Lines, 1987; Ray & Wartes, 1991; Ray, 1988; Taylor, 1986). Although, Delahooke (1986) found that homeschooled children were less peer oriented than students who attended private schools.

These positive results should be tempered with several cautions: many of the studies analyzed involved self-selected subjects and it is impossible to know how these same students would have done if they had been enrolled in a public school (Ray & Wartes, 1991; Ray, 1988). This is an important question because

one of the major goals of public education in the United States is to socialize children (Shulman, 1986).

There are widely varying estimates on the number of children being homeschooled in the United States today. A major problem in obtaining an accurate count is that homeschooling information is not specifically included on the 1990 census data (Lines, 1991). However, the Census Bureau and National Center on Education Statistics have begun including questions on homeschooling in order to provide more accurate estimates on the national level (Lyman, 1998). Adding to the problem, states have widely disparate requirements for centralized reporting and in some states it is very difficult to get an accurate count. Another difficulty in attaining an accurate count is that some parents refuse to cooperate with state mandated reporting and are simply "underground" homeschoolers. Lines (1991), using a variety of sampling approaches, attempted a very comprehensive estimate of the number of children being homeschooled. In the late 1980's she estimated there were between 200,000 and 300,000 homeschoolers and that the trends indicated the numbers were growing. In a recent (October, 1998) personal communication with Mary Anne Pitman, of Galen and Pitman (1991), the present range is estimated between 800,000 and 1.2 million. The Home Education Research Institute estimates there are 1.5 million students who are homeschooled in the United States (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). This represents approximately 1 to 2 percent of the 52 million students enrolled in public schools in fall 1997 (Spotlight, 1998). However, even this is considered an underestimate due to the

number of families who homeschool underground or are just truant or non-compliant with compulsory attendance laws. Some proponents of homeschooling predict that the movement will eventually include about 5-7 percent of the school-age population (Clark, 1994).

A previously mentioned difficulty in obtaining an accurate count of the number of families homeschooling their children is that some families refuse to comply with state reporting laws. There has been a great deal of litigation in the last 30 years regarding the state's right to establish compulsory attendance laws and a parent's right to govern the education of their own children. As homeschooling became more popular, states vigorously defended their compulsory attendance laws (Richardson & Zirkel, 1991). Neither the United States Constitution nor the Bill of Rights mention education, leaving educational decisions to the states (Lyman, 1998). By 1900, all northern states had compulsory attendance laws and southern states soon followed suit (Richardson & Zirkel, 1991). Even though the Supreme Court upheld the state's right to compel school attendance in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) homeschooling parents have had great success in the courts, partly due to the efforts of the Home School Legal Defense Association (Lines, 1987; Cibulka, 1991). One of the reasons for their success is that homeschoolers seek less rather than more state intrusion and have placed states in the position of arguing that the state has a compelling state interest in the homeschools. In addition, taxpayers and state governments tend to support efforts of homeschoolers who are basically asking for fewer fiscal and tangible resources. Finally, it has been difficult for states to

demonstrate that harm is being done to children who are homeschooled. In fact, often the court cases end up outlining performance problems in the public schools compared to the above average performance of the children who are homeschooled (Cibulka, 1991; Clark, 1994). In 1993, it finally became legal to homeschool in all 50 states, although state regulations controlling the process still vary widely (Kantrowitz & Wingert).

Even though homeschooling is not new and is receiving a lot of attention in the popular press, there is limited research on the subject (Knowles, 1988). There is a significant literature created by publications espousing homeschooling, but most of these articles are not research-based. The present study sought to address some of the questions that are either absent from the current research literature on homeschooling or have been researched very lightly. Besides standard questions about choosing homeschooling due to religious purposes and higher achievement, what, if any, impact have educational reform efforts had on parents' decisions to homeschool their children? Additionally, with the Internet and the world of information now at your fingertips, are computers being used in homeschooling and, if so, are they a necessary component? Last, is there anything the public schools can do to re-attract families who have made the decision to homeschool?

Method

Participants

Participants were 69 of 400 members of the Kentucky Home Schooling Association (KHEA) who agreed to participate by returning a self-addressed

stamped survey instrument. The 400 members represented the entire mailing list of the KHEA.

Materials

The survey instrument (Appendix A) consists of eight forced choice and five open-ended questions. An effort was made to include questions that explain why parents have chosen to homeschool, how important the use of computers are to the decision to homeschool, what parents see as advantages and disadvantages of both homeschooling and public schooling, and what public schools can do to re-attract families who have decided to homeschool.

Procedure

In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the State Department of Education maintains no centralized record of the names and addresses of parents who choose to homeschool their children. In order to survey the greatest number of parents, the president of the KHEA was contacted to discuss the possibility of surveying their membership. KHEA is the homeschooling organization with the largest membership in Kentucky. Their president presented a copy of the survey to the KHEA executive board and they approved sending it out as an attachment to their summer newsletter if it met the following criteria: one page, no personally identifiable or specific demographic identifying data, foldable with return address and postage applied.

The survey was sent to the KHEA president in June 1996 and was mailed from their organization with the July newsletter mailing. During July through November, surveys were returned.

Results

A total of 400 surveys were mailed and 69 were returned. Table 1 presents percent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with each of the forced choice questions.

Survey summary statements:	Agree	Disagree
Desire to include religious teachings	75%	25%
Belief higher academic achievement levels can be obtained	98%	2%
Dislike changes in schools due to educational reform in Kentucky	78%	22%
School reform in Kentucky increases inclination to send to public school	6%	94%
Dislike social influence of peer groups in public schools	98%	2%
Computers important part of curriculum	63%	~~32%~~ 37%
Internet important part of curriculum	20%	80%
Probably would not homeschool without computer access	2%	98%

In addition to the forced choice questions, there were five open-ended questions on the survey. The responses follow.

"What are the primary advantages of home-schooling?" The most common answer centered on the theme that the parents believed that their children can learn at their own pace better at home than at school. Additional common responses were that homeschooling brings families closer together, that

home-schooling provides students with "proper" social, moral, and religious values, and that there is an advantage of having a flexible schedule to teach the desired curriculum.

"What are the primary disadvantages of home-schooling?" There was a wider range of responses and few common answers to this question. One of the most cited answers was that there was no free time for the parents of home-schooled children. Another frequently stated response dealt with a variety of financial issues such as paying taxes for local schools without receiving any benefits for their money. Several responses mentioned a lack of peer socialization as a disadvantage of homeschooling.

"What are the primary advantages of public schools?" Parent responses to this question were meager. The two most common answers were that there were no advantages to public schooling or that there is an advantage due to the opportunity for extracurricular activities. Less commonly cited responses were: schools are paid by public taxes, parents are provided free time, and schools have special equipment such as laboratories.

"What are the primary disadvantages of public schooling?" This question resulted in a wide variety of responses. The main theme was the issue of the proper values that are not allowed to be taught in the public schools due to "political correctness" of our society today.

The final question was **"What do the public schools need to change in order to re-attract the families who have decided to home-school their children."** This question generated the greatest consensus of response. The

main focus of most responses were religious. The majority specifically stated that schools need to teach good values which stem from learning the word of God. It appeared they were not requesting a class in religion but that religion should be a constant factor in the school's operation and that all facets of the school operations should be based on religious principles. Most of the responses also expressed concern with discipline and several mentioned concern with their perceived power that students have over teachers and administrators.

Summary and Conclusions

Parents in this study appear to choose to homeschool due to religion, social factors, and a desire for high achievement. They see both advantages and disadvantages to public schooling and to homeschooling. Participating parents appear to dislike educational reform efforts in Kentucky and indicate that the reforms increase the parental desire to homeschool their children. Although they are not considered absolutely essential to the decision to homeschool, computers are being used to augment the curriculum. This supports previous research that being hooked up to Internet is a positive resource for parents who choose to homeschool (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998).

To the question of whether there is anything the public schools can do to re-attract families who have made the decision to homeschool, this question generated the greatest consensus of response. Most of the parents who responded emphasized that in order to reconsider the public schools as a viable choice, schools need to be infused with religious practices and teachings.

Lines (1987) is probably correct when she states that public school educators have two choices when it comes to homeschools. They can choose to keep the doors of the public schools closed to homeshoolers, or they can develop mutual trust and begin to work together to ensure well-educated children in their community. There are many activities in the public schools in which homeschoolers would like to participate, such as extracurricular activities (Phi Delta Kappa, 1998). Both the National Education Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals have gone on record opposed to homeschooling for a variety of reasons such as lack of social interaction, lack of a full range curriculum, and unqualified instructors (Clark, 1994). Public school educators have tended to take homeschooling as a personal reproach (Knowles, 1988) and we must get beyond that defensiveness if we are to develop a positive working relationship.

Homeschooling must now be considered a legitimate venture (Taylor, 1997). The practitioners represent a cross section of society; it is not a fringe group (Knowles, 1988). However, the future of homeschooling depends on several factors. Now that all 50 states are putting fewer legal obstacles in the way of homeschoolers, the future of the movement depends on the continued academic and socio-emotional success of the children it produces, the continued commitment of the parents who sacrifice their time, effort, and money, and the availability of other options for their children's education (including reformed public schools and emergence of a variety of private schools) (Clark, 1994; Lines, 1987).

Ray's (1988) question regarding whether a large group of individualists who have been homeschooled will ultimately be good for our democratic society remains a concern. Good longitudinal research is needed to answer this question.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Home-schooling: Who and Why?

This survey is being conducted by Dr. Deborah Grubb, Assistant Professor of Education at Morehead State University. There is a growing trend in the United States for home-schooling. This project is trying to determine the major reasons parents express for home-schooling. This survey is being mailed to all members of the Kentucky Home Education Association through KHEA. Your president did not give me your names and addresses, therefore this survey is completely confidential. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to complete the survey, please return it to the address below. Your return of the survey will be considered your consent to participate. A summary of findings will be sent to your KHEA president this fall for dissemination to the membership.
Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Deborah Grubb, Asst. Professor
503 Ginger Hall
Morehead State University
Morehead, KY 40351

(Please place a check under the correct response)	Agree	Disagree
I have chosen to home-school my child because I want to include religious teachings in my child's education	_____	_____
I have chosen to home-school my child because I believe he/she will achieve higher academic levels than in the public school	_____	_____
I home-school my child because I do not like the changes that have taken place in educational reform in Kentucky	_____	_____
School reform in Kentucky has made me more inclined to consider sending my child to the public schools	_____	_____
I home-school my child because I do not like the social influences of the peer groups in the public schools	_____	_____
We use computers as an important part of our curriculum	_____	_____
We use internet as an important part of our curriculum	_____	_____
I would probably not home-school my child if we did not have access to a computer	_____	_____

What are the primary advantages of home-schooling?_____
_____
_____

What are the primary disadvantages of home-schooling?_____
_____
_____

What are the primary advantages of public schooling?_____
_____
_____

What are the primary disadvantages of public schooling?_____
_____
_____

What do the public schools need to change in order to re-attract the families who have decided to home-school their children?_____
_____
_____